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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet presents First Lady Laura Bush's "Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Initiative," whose goals are to highlight successful early childhood programs that teach children important pre-reading and vocabulary skills; provide parents and caregivers with information to help their children learn; and help recruit and retain excellent teachers. Following a foreword by Laura Bush, the pamphlet presents an executive summary of the Ready to Read, Ready to Learn initiative; a brief summary of the initiative; a description of the White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development; a brief description of two programs that work (the Margaret H. Cone Head Start Center in Dallas, Texas, and the Reach Out and Read program); advice on assisting parents and caregivers in helping their children learn; ways to recruit, train, and retain the best and brightest teachers; and efforts at teacher training enrichment. (RS)

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ED 469 448

Ready to Read, Ready to Learn

an education initiative by Laura Bush

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CS 511 602

Dear Friends:

Some of my fondest childhood memories are of the times when my mother would put her arms around me and read to me. Little did I know that she was doing much more than providing comfort and entertainment. She was paving the way for learning and success in school.

Research tells us that the early experiences and education we provide our children shape the way they think and learn. The quality of these experiences affects children's enthusiasm for learning, their ability to interact with others and their ability to cope with successes and failures throughout their lives.

Unfortunately, not all children are as lucky as I was. Some children enter school without knowing even the basics, such as the alphabet and counting. For these children, reading and learning can be a struggle. If they are unable to overcome this obstacle, their loss affects all of society. Children who have not learned important skills cannot reach their full potential.

Our challenge is to reach these children early so that they start school with the skills needed to learn. Once they are in the classroom, children deserve excellent teachers and a quality education. This is their birthright.

As a mother and former public school teacher and librarian, I believe we have a duty to help our children achieve. And I am proud to join President Bush in his mission to make America's schools the best they can be. Working together, we will create a better future for America where every child receives a quality education and no child is left behind.

Sincerely

Laura Bush

Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Executive Summary

Laura Bush understands the responsibility that parents and other adults have to help children develop strong cognitive skills in the early years so they are prepared to learn and excel once they enter school. As a former public school teacher, Mrs. Bush also knows that the quality of children's education hinges on the quality of teachers.

With this in mind, Mrs. Bush launched her *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* initiative with two major goals:

- to ensure that all young children are ready to read and learn when they enter their first classroom; and

- to ensure that in all their schooling, children have well-trained, quality teachers, especially in our most impoverished neighborhoods.

The *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* initiative works to achieve these goals by:

- highlighting successful early childhood programs with pre-reading and vocabulary activities and sharing information with parents, teachers and others; and

- recruiting and preparing teachers and strengthening teacher training for new and existing teachers.

Teaching reading is one of the most important domestic priorities in America today. The Bush administration wants parents—children's first and most important teachers—and teachers in our classrooms to have the most effective tools and information for teaching reading. Reading is the skill upon which all other learning skills are built.

Research shows that reading to our children early and often is one of the best ways to ensure success in school and in life. Children need basic skills to prepare them for learning to read. Because these skills are not developed automatically, children need help and practice. These basic skills are developed through language play, sound games, reading aloud together and talking about characters and content in books.

Many children have difficulties learning to read because they did not develop the basic building blocks of language during their early years.

Vocabulary knowledge, letter recognition and phonemic awareness are significant predictors of a child's ability to do well in school. For example, reading scores in the 10th grade can be predicted with surprising accuracy based on a child's knowledge of the alphabet in kindergarten.

Mrs. Bush believes that everyone in America should know how important basic language and reading skills are for young children. Moms, dads, grandparents and all those who care for children at some point during the day need to know about specific, age-appropriate and fun activities that prepare children for learning in school.

Just as children should be ready to learn to read when they start school, teachers need to be ready to teach reading when they enter the classroom. Research shows which teaching methods are most effective. Teachers should learn these methods, and colleges of education should teach them. Teachers need training and the resources to succeed, including:

- a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of teaching skills and subject content;
- the ability to assess student needs, including early diagnosis of reading difficulties; and
- the most effective instructional tools.

The Bush administration's commitment to early childhood and teachers is backed by *The No Child Left Behind Act* and the greatest federal investment ever including—$4 billion to recruit, prepare and train teachers and $75 million for early childhood teacher training programs. The act, passed overwhelmingly by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Bush in January 2002, gives schools much more flexibility to use federal funds where the local need is greatest. The U.S. Department of Education is developing a database of the most recent and most reliable information on what works in teaching reading. Teachers and schools will have the best information available.

These reforms and resources are key to improving America's schools.

Initiative Summary

Mrs. Bush's *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* initiative is an integral part of the President's education reforms. The initiative is designed to:

- Highlight successful early childhood programs that teach children important pre-reading and vocabulary skills;
- Provide parents and caregivers with information that will help them help their children learn; and
- Help recruit and retain excellent teachers by:
  - Strengthening teacher standards and teacher education programs;
  - Turning out more college graduates who are well-versed in the liberal arts and solidly educated in the subjects they plan to teach;
  - Enriching teacher training for new and experienced teachers; and
  - Providing mentors for new teachers and incentives to retain teachers.

Highlighting Successful Early Childhood Programs

Many children simply do not have the early opportunities that help them to develop a love for language and reading. Not having those opportunities can have devastating effects on a child's success in school. For many children, being left behind does not begin in elementary school—it begins in the years between the crib and the classroom.

The scientific research of the past decade shows how children learn to read and how parents and teachers can enhance that process. Evidence clearly shows.that parents and pre-school programs can use specific age-appropriate and fun activities to help children get ready to read and ready to learn.

Laura Bush believes we can provide beneficial experiences for growing children, especially during the vital formative years. With good instruction and supportive families, children learn language through interesting conversations that are enriched by books, stories and explanations. Mrs. Bush also wants parents, grandparents and caregivers to learn more about the science of preparing children for success in school.

The White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development

In July 2001, Mrs. Bush hosted the *White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development* with U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson. The summit was designed to develop a clear understanding of what parents, grandparents, early childhood educators, childcare providers and other caregivers can systematically do to provide children with rich and rewarding experiences during their first years of life.

Research tells us a great deal about what skills and knowledge children need to be prepared for success in elementary and secondary schools. The development of early language and pre-reading skills is fundamental to a child's reading ability, academic achievement and success throughout life. Unfortunately, many homes and classrooms around the country do not have enough information to take advantage of the latest research.

At this two-day gathering, educators, caregivers and policymakers from across the country heard from some of America's most respected researchers in the field of early childhood cognitive development and from those who put research into practice with great results.

Leaders in government and academia and practitioners spoke about activities for babies and children to prepare them for reading and learning. The summit continued with the latest research and ways to share information about developing strong cognitive skills in preschool programs, at home and in other venues.

Scientists talked about the infant brain and how babies seek out and acquire a tremendous amount of language information in the first year of life. Even before babies can speak, they have already figured out many of the components of language. They know which particular sounds their language uses, what sounds can be combined to create words, and the tempo and rhythm of words and phrases.

Science shows a strong connection between early language development and reading. Language and reading require the same types of sound analysis. The better babies are at distinguishing the building blocks of speech at six months, the better they will be at other more complex language skills at two and three years old, and the easier it will be for them at four and five years old to grasp the idea of how sounds link to letters.

Children need help learning these concepts. Children will not learn the name of the letter "A," the sound an "A" makes or how to print it simply by watching adults read or by being around adults who love books. Children learn these concepts when adults take the time and effort to teach them in an exciting and engaging way.

This does not mean preschool children should be taught using the same methods and materials that are used with first- and second-graders. The challenge for parents, grandparents, preschool teachers or childcare providers is to develop enjoyable, educational language activities that also engage and nurture children's interests, social competencies and emotional health. These goals can be met, but there must be a clear and equal emphasis on building cognitive skills.

Programs That Work

The Margaret H. Cone Center

The Margaret H. Cone Head Start Center, located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Dallas, Texas, uses a program developed at Southern Methodist University called LEAP, the Language Enrichment Activities Program.

This program is rich in pre-reading and vocabulary development activities—activities that are fun for children and designed to cultivate those skills that are good predictors of children's later success in school. After this language-rich program was introduced in 1994, achievement levels soared for children who went on from the Cone Center into the local public school.

Mrs. Bush is working to promote language-rich pre-school programs like LEAP, which develop strong cognitive abilities in children. She wants to make sure that early childhood programs have the information to follow their lead.

Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read (ROR) makes early literacy a standard part of pediatric primary care. Pediatricians encourage parents to read aloud to their young children and give books to their patients to take home at all pediatric check-ups from six months to five years of age. Volunteers in clinic waiting rooms read aloud to children, showing parents and children the fun techniques of using books together. Parents hear repeatedly that reading aloud is the most important thing they can do to teach their children to love reading and to help them start school ready to learn.

Reach Out and Read is a nonprofit organization founded in 1989 at Boston Medical Center (formerly Boston City Hospital) through a collaboration of pediatricians and early childhood educators. With both public and private funding, the ROR National Center provides start-up and sustainability funding for books, as well as training and technical assistance, to ROR programs across the country.

Assisting Parents and Caregivers in Helping Their Children Learn

All parents should know how important it is to read to their babies and to encourage children to play with books before they enter school. Research on language acquisition and brain development shows that the groundwork for reading starts at birth.

Healthy Start, Grow Smart

The *Healthy Start, Grow Smart* magazine series provides parents with critical information about the early development, health, nutrition and safety needs of babies and toddlers.

Mrs. Bush initiated a similar effort in Texas and is now bringing this same helpful information to new parents across the country. The magazine outlines activities that stimulate infant brain development to help ensure that children are building the cognitive abilities essential for learning once they reach school. It also includes information on various stages of development in infants and on how to nurture and protect our youngest children. The series is available in English and Spanish.

These magazines are available to states for distribution to new mothers through health and human services agencies and from the U.S. Department of Education. The entire series will be available on the White House Web site at www.whitehouse.gov/firstlady/.

Put Reading First

Mrs. Bush spotlighted two publications at the October 2001 Regional Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development in Cincinnati, hosted by the Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky state departments of education. This conference was designed to bring together educators, leaders, researchers and policymakers in the area of early childhood cognitive development to present the proven, research-based strategies parents and teachers can use to promote learning readiness among young children.

The first publication, *Put Reading First: Helping Your Child Learn to Read* (preschool through third grade), offers information about pre-reading and reading activities that are proven to help children learn to read and read well. The second publication, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (kindergarten through third grade), puts

research-based approaches for effective pre-reading and reading instruction into an easy-to-use format for teachers.

Both publications are the work of the Partnership for Reading, a collaboration of the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute for Literacy and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development. You can find the publications on the Web at www.nochildleftbehind.gov.

Teaching Our Youngest

This guide to early childhood learning outlines the steps educators and caregivers can take to help ensure strong cognitive development and strong social and emotional development of children. Prepared by the Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this booklet draws from scientifically based research about what can be done to help children develop language abilities, strengthen vocabulary, become familiar with books and other printed materials, learn letters and sounds, recognize numbers and learn to count.

Teaching Our Youngest acknowledges the important role preschool teachers, childcare providers and family members play in the lives of young children and offers concrete examples for use in daily activities. Through specific demonstrations, teachers can learn simple strategies to nurture the natural curiosity of children and their zest for learning while incorporating cognitive development and early literacy activities into daily routines. This publication is available on the Web at www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/teachingouryoungest/.

The Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force has also compiled a list of simple ways parents and caregivers can help their children grow and develop the skills that will help them succeed in life. Titled *7 Super Things Parents and Caregivers Can Do*, the list offers these tips:

1. Talk often with your children from the day they are born.
2. Hug them, hold them and respond to their needs and interests.
3. Listen carefully as your children communicate with you.
4. Read aloud to your children every day, even when they are babies. Play and sing with them often.
5. Say "yes" and "I love you" as much as you say "no" and "don't."
6. Ensure a safe, orderly and predictable environment, wherever they are.
7. Set limits on their behavior and discipline them calmly, not harshly.

Recruit, Train and Retain the Best and Brightest Teachers

Dedicated teachers inspire young students to achieve their greatest potential. Teachers are the heart and soul of America's schools, and they deserve our support.

While many wonderful teachers are already at work in U.S. schools, more than two million new teachers will be needed over the next decade. America needs to create more opportunities and incentives for men and women to enter the teaching profession. Many talented, well-qualified people have the desire to teach but do not have education degrees.

Mrs. Bush's goal is to help encourage college students, professionals and military retirees to bring their talents and experience to classrooms across the United States, especially in inner-city public schools where the need is greatest.

Teacher Training and Recruitment Programs

Many high-achieving students are not enrolling in U.S. colleges of education. On average, those who do enroll have lower verbal and math scores than their peers in other fields of study. Studies show that teachers with higher standardized test scores leave teaching at much higher rates than those with lower scores.

Mrs. Bush supports programs that draw teaching candidates from non-traditional sources, such as:

- Teach For America—which recruits talented students from U.S. colleges and universities to teach in inner-city and rural schools;
- The New Teacher Project—which matches talented mid-career professionals with schools in greatest need;
- Troops to Teachers—a program that taps retired service men and women for the classroom; and
- Transition to Teaching—a federal program that helps states and school districts fund innovative teacher recruitment programs at the local level.

Teach For America

Teach For America recruits a national corps of recent college graduates from all academic majors to commit two years to teaching in schools where they are needed most. Corps members receive an intensive five-week training program where they gain experience teaching and are guided by veteran educators.

Teach For America was officially launched in 1989. During its first year, 2,500 men and women from more than 100 colleges applied to the program. Since then, more than 6,000 Teach For America corps members have taught nearly a half-million children.

Each year, more than 1,500 Teach For America corps members teach more than 100,000 students at 15 locations across the country: Atlanta, Baltimore, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Orleans, New York City, North Carolina, Phoenix, the Texas Rio Grande Valley, rural Louisiana and Washington, D.C.

The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project works with school districts, state departments of education and universities to recruit, select, train and support outstanding new teachers from non-traditional backgrounds. The focus of the project is getting our nation's top minds to commit to improving public education through teaching. Using innovative recruitment techniques, the project attracts high-achieving individuals who want to make a difference in the lives of children. By providing these individuals with training and preparation, The New Teacher Project helps ensure that participants are successful once they reach the classroom.

Project partners include school districts in New York City; Washington, D.C.; San Jose, Calif.; Denver, Colo.; Kansas City, Kan. and Mo.; Baton Rouge, La.; and Duval County, Fla. Through these partnerships, the program has helped attract and prepare more than 2,600 new, high-quality teachers, launched almost 20 programs in 10 states, and developed 10 training institutes.

Troops to Teachers

The Troops to Teachers program was developed through the U.S. Departments of Defense and Education to assist the transition of former and retiring military and civilian Department of Defense personnel into the

teaching field. Since the inception of the program in January 1994, nearly 4,000 service members from all branches of the military have entered the teaching profession.

Troops to Teachers candidates have served their country and want to do more for America's next generation. The program recruits talented, retired military personnel whose experience, maturity and strength of character can make a real difference in the classroom. About 86 percent of the Troops to Teachers are male; 33 percent are minorities; 28 percent teach math and science; and most teach in schools with many at-risk children.

President Bush promoted and signed legislation that increased funding for the Troops to Teachers program from $3 million in 2001 to $18 million in 2002. And he proposed increasing funding for this program to $20 million in fiscal year 2003.

Transition to Teaching

The Transition to Teaching program supports partnerships to recruit, train and place highly qualified, mid-career professionals and recent college graduates as teachers in America's classrooms.

Authorized by the landmark *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the program provides grants to recruit, train and place talented college graduates in non-teaching fields to teach in the schools that need them most. Transition to Teaching will support these new teachers during their first year in the classroom. The program offers competitive, five-year grants to state and local education agencies, educational service agencies and nonprofit organizations.

The grants may be used for scholarships, stipends, bonuses and other financial incentives; training and support activities; and for developing, recruiting and retaining teachers.

Transition to Teaching was allocated $35 million in fiscal year 2002, and President Bush's fiscal year 2003 budget would increase funding to $39.4 million.

Teacher Training Enrichment

New elementary school teachers sometimes find themselves standing at the head of a classroom and realizing that they have no idea—practically speaking—how to teach children to read. Some of those same teachers do not have a well-developed, deep understanding and knowledge of the subjects they teach.

Tragically, children most in need—students in inner-city and rural schools—are least likely to have teachers who are best prepared to help them. For example, 43 percent of math teachers in high-poverty schools neither majored nor minored in math-related fields, compared to 27 percent in low-poverty schools.

Studies of teachers fresh out of college show that many are not prepared for the challenges of today's classrooms. In one study, less than 36 percent of those surveyed said they felt adequately prepared to teach and help their students meet performance standards. Less than 20 percent said they felt prepared to meet the needs of diverse students or those with limited English proficiency.

New teachers also report that even after they realize their shortcomings, they are frustrated in their attempts to find training that will help them become better teachers.

Mrs. Bush believes that our obligation to teachers is as clear and strong as our obligation to America's children—to ensure that children are taught by teachers who not only bring love, compassion and dedication to their profession, but who also have:

- A deep and up-to-date knowledge of the concepts and subjects they are teaching; and

- The ability to assess each student's academic strengths and weaknesses and to apply the most effective instructional methods, strategies and materials to meet that student's learning needs.

White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers

In an effort to help reverse these trends and as a part of her *Ready to Read, Ready to Learn* initiative, Mrs. Bush hosted the *White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers* on March 5, 2002. The conference brought

together university and business leaders, education advocates, teachers' unions, public policy organizations and foundations from across the United States.

The presenters focused on two major areas of teacher development: teacher preparation at colleges of education and professional development for experienced teachers.

While some schools of education keep abreast of scientific research on teaching and learning, others do not. As a result, prospective teachers often do not benefit from valuable and current bodies of study on what to teach, how to teach, how to monitor student progress and how to help students who are falling behind.

Thanks to current research, today we know which teaching methods are most effective. It is important to share this information with teachers and make sure that all colleges of education are teaching them.

The *No Child Left Behind Act*

President and Mrs. Bush are committed to having a quality teacher in every classroom in America. They know that we can strengthen teacher quality in our public schools by investing in training and retention of high-quality teachers.

In January 2002, President Bush signed a historic piece of legislation called the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which was overwhelmingly passed by Congress. This new law gives schools greater flexibility to use federal funds where the local need is greatest: to recruit new teachers, to improve teacher training or to increase teacher pay in critical areas.

The President understands these needs, and his proposed budget for fiscal year 2003 reflects his understanding, providing $4 billion overall for teacher recruitment, training and staff development.

Ready to Read, Ready to Learn
Early Childhood Initiative

The White House
Office of Laura Bush

U.S. Department of Education
Rod Paige
Secretary

September 2002

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